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AM-GUANTANAMO SKED 9-9
BY JUAN J. WALTE

WASHINGTON (UPI) -- THE KREMLIN MAY DEMAND THE PULLOUT OF U.S. MILITARY FORCES FROM CUBA'S GUANTANAMO BAY IN EXCHANGE FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF A SOVIET COMBAT BRIGADE FROM THE ISLAND.

BUT SUCH A PROPOSAL IS LIKELY TO FALL ON DEAF EARS. THE UNITED STATES HAS MADE CLEAR OVER THE YEARS THAT THE ONLY AMERICAN MILITARY INSTALLATION ON COMMUNIST TERRITORY IS NOT NEGOTIABLE.

THE ISSUE OF GUANTANAMO WAS RAISED FRIDAY BY A SOVIET CORRESPONDENT DURING THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S DAILY NEWS BRIEFING. SOVIET REPORTERS USUALLY ECHO THE POINT OF VIEW OF THEIR GOVERNMENT, PARTICULARLY ON SUCH A DELICATE ISSUE.

"CAN YOU INFORM US HOW MANY AMERICAN COMBAT TROOPS ARE NOW IN CUBA?," THE CORRESPONDENT ASKED. STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN HODDING CARTER DIDN'T KNOW AT FIRST, BUT LATER PROVIDED THE ANSWER:

AS OF JUNE 30, THERE WERE 2,203 U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL AT GUANTANAMO -- 1,769 FROM THE NAVY, 431 MARINES AND THREE FROM THE AIR FORCE. THERE ALSO WERE SOME 3,600 DEPENDENTS AND CIVILIAN WORKERS.

"WHAT ARE THEY DOING THERE?," THE SOVIET CORRESPONDENT INSISTED.

"THEY ARE THERE UNDER A LONG-TERM BASE AGREEMENT WHICH WE HAVE MAINTAINED LONGER THAN I HAVE BEEN AROUND," CARTER REPLIED.

"ARE THERE ANY PLANS TO WITHDRAW THEM?" THE SOVIET CORRESPONDENT WENT ON.

"NO, NONE," THE SPOKESMAN SAID.

LATER IN THE BRIEFING, AN AMERICAN REPORTER ASKED WHAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD DO "IF IT SHOULD TURN OUT THAT THE SOVIET UNION WERE TO PURSUE THIS AS A POLICY LINE, THAT SOMEHOW GUANTANAMO SHOULD BE EXCHANGED FOR THIS COMBAT UNIT THERE."

"IT IS NOT NEGOTIABLE ... AND THAT IS A LONG-STANDING POSITION THAT WE HAVE THERE," CARTER REPLIED.

THE GUANTANAMO NAVAL BASE IS A 31-SQUARE-MILE MILITARY INSTALLATION LOCATED ON A CUBA'S SOUTHEASTERN COAST ACROSS THE WINDWARD PASSAGE FROM HAITI.

STRATEGICALLY LOCATED BETWEEN THE CARIBBEAN SEA AND THE ATLANTIC OCEAN, THE BASE HAS BEEN UNDER U.S. CONTROL SINCE 1903. IT IS ONE OF THE TWO MAIN AMERICAN NAVAL BASES IN THE CARIBBEAN AREA. THE OTHER IS ROOSEVELT ROADS IN PUERTO RICO.

IN 1934, CUBA GAVE THE UNITED STATES CONTROL OF GUANTANAMO IN PERPETUITY. BUT CUBAN PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO HAS MAINTAINED THE ACCORD ENDED IN 1959 WHEN HE CAME TO POWER.

FOR THE PAST 20 YEARS, THE U.S. NAVY HAS PAID ABOUT $4,000 A YEAR TO CUBA AS RENT FOR THE BASE. THE PAYMENTS, THROUGH THE SWISS GOVERNMENT, HAVE SO FAR BEEN IGNORED BY CASTRO.

CASTRO HAS MADE CLEAR OVER THE YEARS THAT GUANTANAMO IS ONE OF THE ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED IN ANY TALKS BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND HAVANA ON RESUMING THE DIPLOMATIC TIES BROKEN IN 1961.

"GUANTANAMO IS MILITARILY USELESS FOR THE UNITED STATES TODAY," CASTRO TOLD A U.S. TELEVISION INTERVIEWER TWO YEARS AGO. "THEY KEEP IT AS A SHOW OF STRENGTH ... THEY HAVE NO RIGHT TO BE THERE BECAUSE THEY ARE THERE AGAINST OUR WILL."

BUT, THE CUBAN LEADER SAID HIS TROOPS "HAVE NOT USED NOR ARE WE EVER GOING TO USE FORCE TO RECOVER GUANTANAMO."

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